

SOME ASPECTS OF ZINACANTAN SETTLEMENT PATTERNS AND CEREMONIAL ORGANIZATION *

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0. Introduction.
1. Zinacantan Settlement Patterns
2. Relation of Settlement Patterns to Ceremonial Organization
3. Functions of Rhythmic Ceremonial Movements
4. Implications for the Study of Ancient Maya Society

0. In this paper I shall describe some aspects of the settlement patterns of Zinacantan, trace the relationships of these settlement patterns to ceremonial organization, suggest how rhythmic ceremonial movements have important integrative functions, and discuss the possible implications of these data for our understanding of ancient Maya society. The data should be taken as preliminary since my five-years field study in Chiapas with the cooperation of the Mexican Instituto Nacional Indigenista is still in progress.

1. I have elsewhere (Vogt, 1956) defined settlement patterns as "the patterned manner in which household and community units are arranged spatially over the landscape". With the aid of schematic figures, let us examine how the species Zinacanteco is distributed over the landscape.

1.1. Consider Figure 1. Zinacantan is one of several municipalities of Tzotzi Indians located in the limestone and volcanic,

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pine-covered mountains of Chiapas. Tzotzil is a Mayan language, hence Zinacantan is located near western border of Mayan distribution.

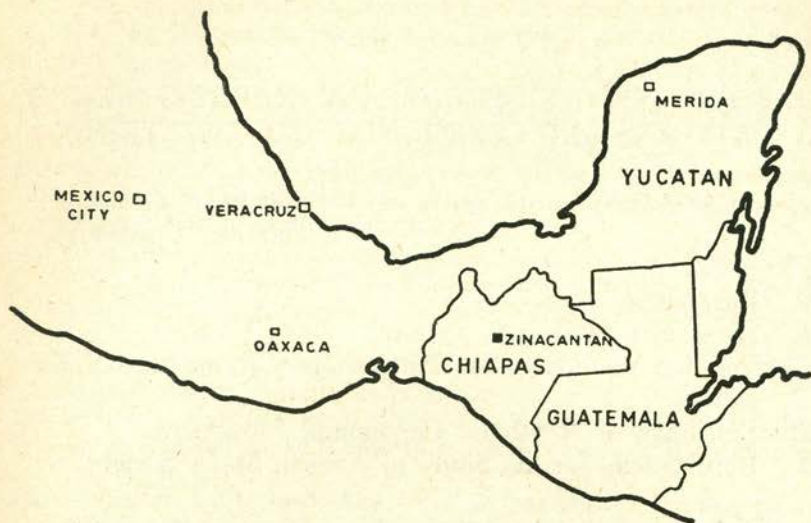


FIG. 1

1.2. Figure 2 shows the location of Zinacantan in relation to the Ladino town of San Cristobal Las Casas located in a mountain valley at 7 000 feet. Note that the municipio of Zinacantan, covering an area of 177 square kilometers and containing a total population of 7 611 Indians,* lies just to the west of San Cristobal along both sides of the Pan American Highway.

Zinacantan constitutes an example of what Sol Tax (1937) has described as a "vacant-town", or Borhegyi (1956) a "concourse" type of settlement pattern. The cabecera, or ceremonial and political center, located near the northern boundary of the municipio, contains the two central Catholic churches with saints that command religious allegiance throughout the municipio; the cabildo where the political officials have their headquarters; and a plaza where important markets are held for the brisk exchange of goods during fiestas. In and around this ceremonial center are located a series of sacred water holes and

* This figure is derived from the 1960 census sheets as these were filled out in Zinacantan.

sacred mountains, all marked by the erection of crosses, which figure importantly in the ceremonial life of the whole municipio.

The population of Zinacantan center is 394, or less than six percent of the total for the municipio. Of this figure, 51 are Ladinos who run small stores in the Center, teach school, and serve in the office of town secretary. It is clear that the bulk of the population lives in scattered small hamlets, or *parajes* as these are called in Chiapas, distributed throughout the northern and western parts of the municipio. There is a steep escarpment just south of Paste where the land drops off precipitously from

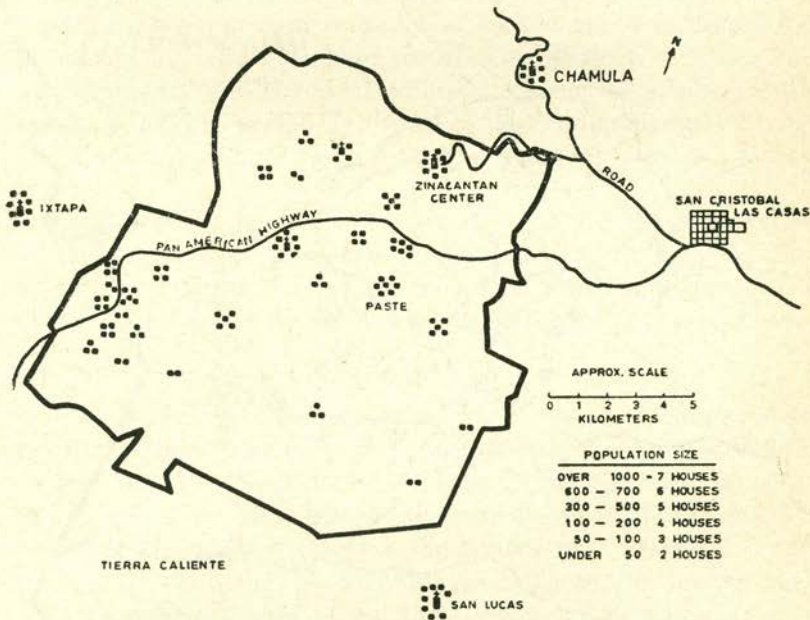


FIG. 2

about 7 000 feet down toward the Tierra Caliente—a physiographic fact which accounts for the low density of settlement in the southern part of the municipio.

The sizes of these hamlets range from small settlements of under 50 people up to large settlements of over 1 200. Relative size is schematically represented by numbers of houses. Two of the *parajes* have small Catholic chapels—a fact to which I shall return later.

Finally, note the locations of Ixtapa and San Lucas, two towns

lying beyond the borders of the municipio, which also figure importantly in the ceremonial life of Zinacantan.

1.3. Figure 3 shows some aspects of the settlement pattern of the paraje of Paste' (with a 1960 population of 1 276) where my field headquarters is located and where I am doing intensive field work. These data are based on an aerial photograph taken in 1954 and brought up to date by field work in the summer of 1959. Note first the pattern of roads and main trails. The road leading in from the Pan American Highway connects the Insti-

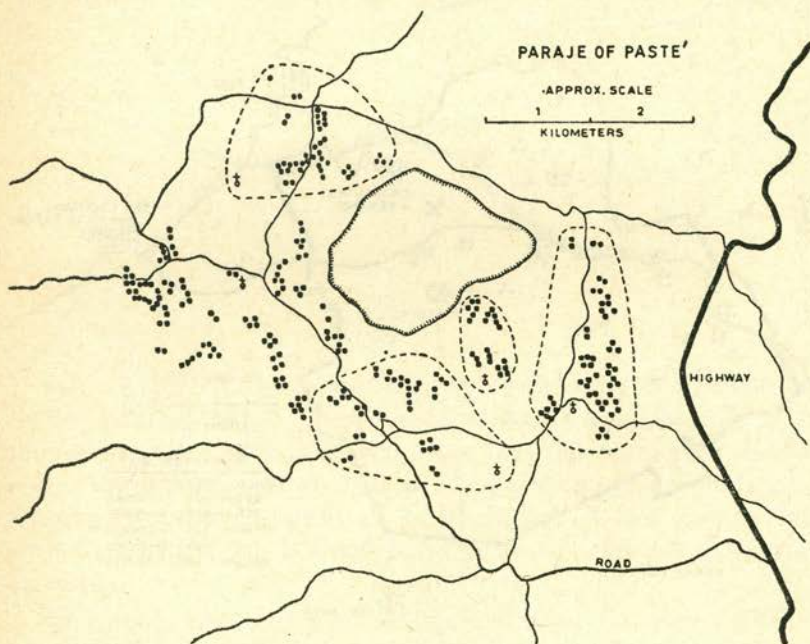


FIG. 3

tut school and our field house with the outside world by jeep or land-rover. The trails leading off to the right connect Paste' with Zinacantan Center some three hours away if you can walk as fast as a Zinacanteco, longer if you cannot! The trails leading off to the left connect Paste' with Tierra Caliente, some 12 or more hours away on foot, where most of the maize feeding the population is grown. At the bottom of the map a trail leads into San Cristobal about 3 to 4 hours away. Other trails connect the various parts of the paraje.

Note that the houses are neither compactly located nor distributed evenly over the 4 by 5 kilometer land area of the paraje. Rather the population is clustered around five important waterholes, indicated by circles with crosses.* These five waterholes are the focal points for each of the settlements—they each have distinctive names and these names are used by the Indians to indicate in which neighborhood of the paraje a person lives. Thus, a family living in the cluster to the right in Figure 3 will carry their household water and water their sheep at Shulvo' and consider themselves as living in Shulvo'. The waterholes are highly sacred, and there are myths about each of them which describe the circumstances under which the ancestors found the water and how the waterhole acquired its distinctive name. The waterholes are also the focal points for special ceremonies, called *k'in krus*, performed by this neighborhood settlement during the Fiesta of Santa Cruz in May and again in October of each year.

Local topography seems to account for the rather peculiar asymmetrical distribution around these waterholes. For example, no families live in the rugged mountain near the upper center of the map. Elsewhere there are steep hillsides that are too precipitous for houses.

1.4 In Figure 4 we see a close-up of Shulvo'. Note how the houses are concentrated in the upper part of a narrow mountain valley, mainly above the waterhole. Below the waterhole the topography becomes rugged again and there are fewer suitable places to build. Note also how the houses are clustered in units of 2, 3, 4 or 5 within the neighborhood. These are, for the most part, the house groups of patrilocal extended families.

While all of the extended families in Shulvo' participate as one unit in the *k'in krus* ceremonies for their waterhole, the other waterhole groups are subdivided into two to seven sets of "patrilineages." I use the word "patrilineage" advisedly for while the *core* of the group living together and providing the name for the group is in fact a patrilineage, it nearly always has other people attached to it, ordinarily by kinship connections that are

* There are three additional small waterholes from which a few families belonging to the paraje of Pasté "carry their water; the other families in these waterhole groups belong to the parajes of Nachih and Elamvo". The fact that waterhole groups cut across paraje lines indicates to me that waterhole groups may be older and more fundamental in the social organization than parajes.

other than strictly patrilineal. For example, in the largest waterhole group, *Vo'ta Paste'* (which is schematically represented to the left in Figure 3 as the neighborhood without a dotted line drawn around it), there are seven sets of "patrilineages" that are well recognized by the community. Each of these "patrilineages" performs its own *k'in krus* ceremony a few days after the ceremony for the whole waterhole group each May and each October, so that it is observationally possible to determine exactly which families belong to it even though many are not related in a strictly patrilineal manner to the group. The "patrilineage" usually takes its name from the predominant family in the

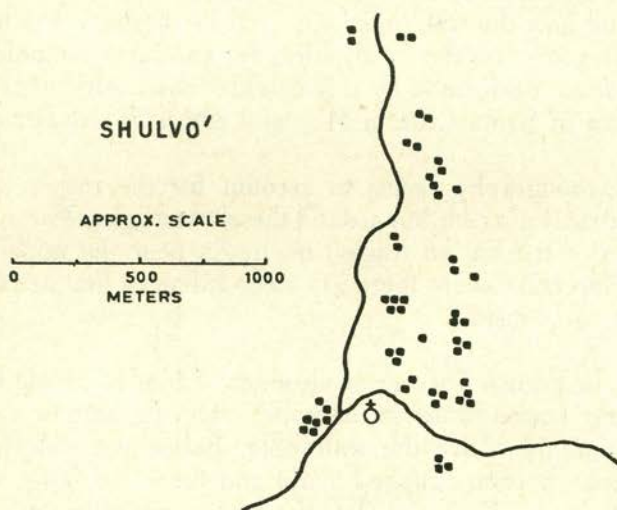


FIG. 4

group. Thus we have "sna chikuetik" which means "the houses of the chikues," and this is the name of large cohesive group with some 35 households containing many "chikues," but also portions of other patrilineages that have intermarried with the "chikues" and settled nearby.*

1.5. Moving to even larger scale in Figure 5, note the principal settlement features of one patrilocal extended family sitio, as the house compounds are called in Chiapas. The sitio is usual-

* A fuller description of the complexities of the social organization has been reserved for a later article.

ly surrounded by a pole and brush fence. Inside are the houses (in this case of a father and two of his married sons), the granary, the sweat house, and, in the center, the patio crosses, which constitute the household shrine. Just outside the fence is located the small milpa and the sheep corral. In a very important sense, the Zinacanteco lives in a milpa and looks out at the world from between the stalks of corn.

2. One of the critical problems for a cultural unit with this type of dispersed settlement pattern is how the unit is to be structurally integrated and coordinated. There are many as-

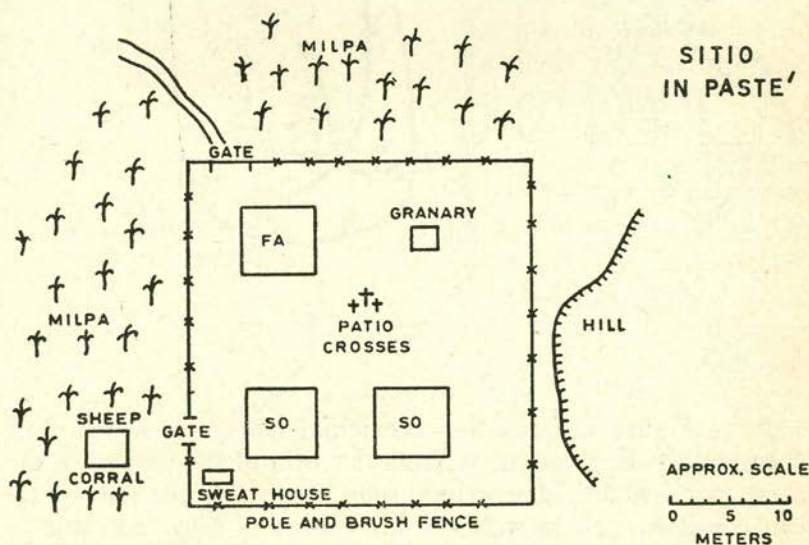


FIG. 5

pects to his problem, but let me concentrate on one aspect: the rhythmic ceremonial movements that occur in the daily and annual flow of Zinacantan life.

2.1. I begin in reverse order. Figure 6 shows on the left the movement of people from houses to the patio crosses for prayers and offerings and to the sweat house. All of this movement takes place within the sitio and has deep ceremonial importance not only in curing ceremonies but at various other points in the ceremonial cycle. On the right, I show the movement of people within the neighborhood cluster from houses to the sacred

waterhole which is the focus for the *k'in krus*. These ceremonies are of crucial structural importance for the families within the waterhole group.

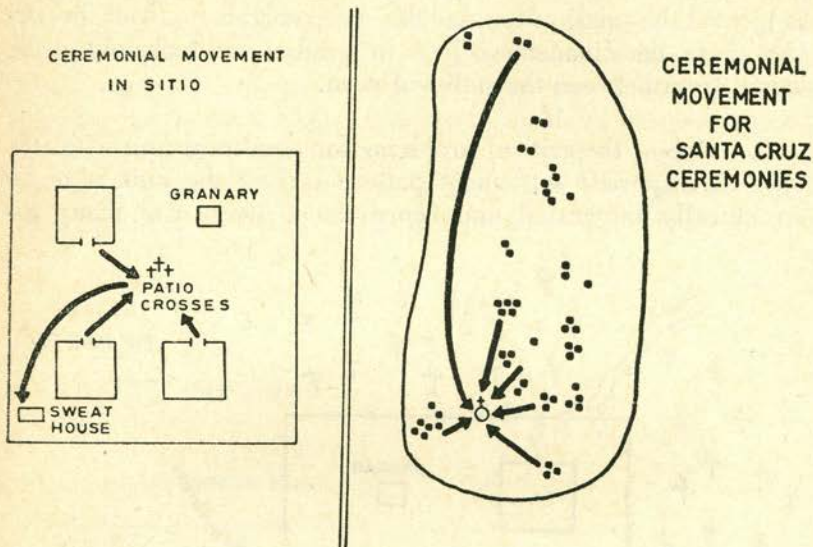


FIG. 6

2.2. Figure 7 shows the ceremonial movement which must occur in a curing ceremony from the sitio of the patient to the ceremonial center. The curing group consists of the patient (if he is well enough to walk, or his clothes if he is not able to make the trip), the *h'ilol* (or curandero), and a group of assistants, the number depending upon the type of ceremony. The group visits in fixed order four sacred mountains located around the ceremonial center. At the first three mountains, prayers are said and offerings left at crosses located at the foot and then on the summit of each of the mountains. The fourth mountain is *Kalvaryo* where it is believed that the ancestral gods have their council meetings.* Special rituals take place here and then the curing group returns to the sitio of the patient to continue with the ceremony. The important point here is that no other mountains close to one's *paraje* can be visited for this ceremony.

* The ancestral gods and other key concepts in the religious system are discussed in Vogt, "Ancient Maya Concepts in Contemporary Zinacantan Religion".

Regardless of how far one lives from the ceremonial center, this ceremonial pilgrimage must ordinarily be made to the proper mountains and these are located around the central ceremonial center.

2.3. Figure 8 brings us to more complex and more geographically distant ceremonial movements which involve larger groups of people. First let me point out the continual movement

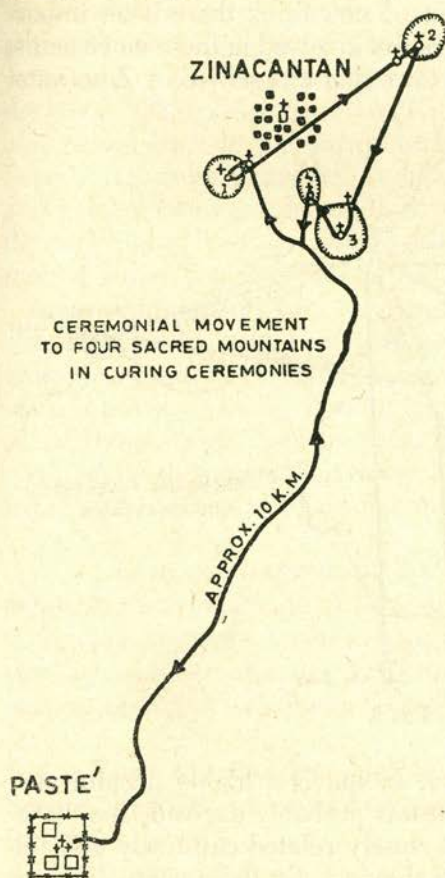


FIG. 7

which occurs between highlands and lowlands as men from Paste' travel to Tierra Caliente to make milpa. Most of this movement is, of course, wholly economic in character. But it is not without its ceremonial aspects since *k'in krus* ceremonies must also be performed in the fields in Tierra Caliente. Next I turn to the cult of the saints which focuses upon the two Catholic churches and the religious hierarchy in Zinacantan center. The fiestas for these saints involve three kinds of important ceremonial movements: (1) the bringing of candles, incense, rockets, aguardiente, and the Catholic priest out from the Ladino town of San Cristóbal. (2) The ceremonial visits of saints from the two parajes that have small chapels and saints of their own—Navenchauk and Salinas—and from two towns—San Lucas and Ixtapa—which are located to the south and west, respectively of the municipio of Zinacantan. These visits are full-scale, pilgrimages involving many people, not only the men who carry the

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saints, but also caretakers of the visiting saints, a brass band that usually comes from San Lucas, carrying their instruments up the mountains, and many others who come along to trade lowland products or just to celebrate during the fiesta. At first I thought the visits of these saint could be interpreted almost purely in economic terms, especially insofar as San Lucas, Ixtapa, and Salinas are all located in lower ecological zones, and I interpreted the movement as having a basic relationship to an exchange of highland and lowland products. I now think there is an important dimension of social integration involved in these movements, for I find that San Lucas is a town that was settled by Zinacante-

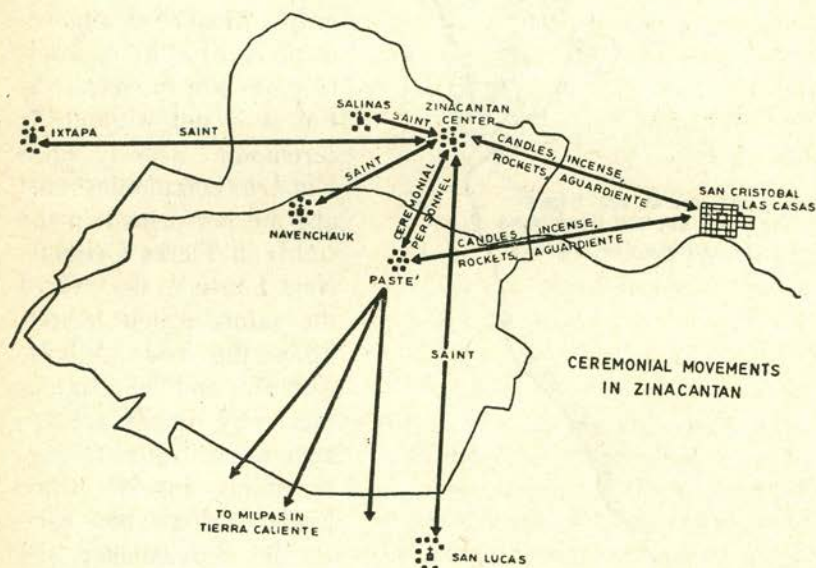


FIG. 8

cos within the past 100 years. Ixtapa is a highly acculturated town whose Indian population was probably derived from Zinacantan, or which was at least closely related culturally and linguistically with Zinacantan in the past. By these visits Zinacantan center is not only commanding ceremonial and political allegiance from the parajes with chapels and saints of their own, like Navenchawk which is threatening to split off from Zinacantan, but is also still reaching beyond the borders of the municipio to retain important ceremonial links with towns that historically were probably offshoots from Zinacantan. (3) There

is finally a structurally very strategic movement of ceremonial personnel from parajes to the ceremonial center to fill cargo positions in the all-important religious hierarchy of Zinacantan. This hierarchy consists of a ranked series of four levels of priestly officials. To pass through this ceremonial ladder a man must serve a year at each level, and during the time he holds a cargo he is expected to move into the ceremonial center and engage in a complex annual round of ceremonies. The ceremonies are expensive, costing as much as 7 000 pesos for some cargos, and time-consuming. But while he fills the role he enjoys special prestige and he wears special costumes for ritual occasions. At the end of the year he turns the office over to the next incumbent, and moves back to the paraje to become a corn-farmer again. Some years must elapse before he can work himself out of debt and accumulate enough wealth to ask for the cargo position at the next higher level. And so on until he passes through the ceremonial ladder and becomes an honored "pasado".

I am impressed by how efficiently this system works in Zinacantan to handle a very complex ceremonial life and to transmit quite complicated ceremonial knowledge, without having permanent positions in the system. It is purely a system of rotation of personnel from corn-farming in the parajes to ceremonial positions in the ceremonial center and back again to corn-farming. I shall return to this point in a moment.

3. I have not covered all the details of ceremonial movements in Zinacantan. But I have said enough to indicate how I think these rhythmic ceremonial movements of people and ceremonial paraphernalia link Zinacantan center with its far-flung parajes and with off-shoots beyond its municipio borders.

4. I now wish to advance an hypothesis concerning the possible implications of these data for the study of ancient Maya society.

4.1. For a variety of reasons I believe that Zinacantan exemplifies a number of critical features of subsistence, settlement pattern, and social and ceremonial organization that stem from early periods in Maya cultural history. Adams' (1961) recent archaeological survey of the Central Highlands of Chiapas bears out this assumption that this region was less influen-

ced by other major Mesoamerican centers than either the peninsula of Yucatan or the Guatemalan Highlands. I think it is quite likely that the three contiguous areas of the Petén, the Cuchumatanes, and Highland Chiapas are importantly interrelated historically and that they constitute perhaps the crucial region for the understanding of Maya culture in *relatively undisturbed form* at various time levels.

I do not think there will be much argument about the basic subsistence system, for take away machetes, axes, chickens (which probably replaced turkeys), sheep, and a few horses, mules, and pigs and the system looks like the ancient Maya subsistence pattern. While there are nucleated Maya communities in various regions today, I would guess that these are the results of either very special geographical circumstances (Lake Atitlán, for example) or the results of successful programs of change by the Central Mexican invasion of Maya land at about 1000 A. D. and reactions to this invasion, or of policies of reduccion by the Spanish conquerors. In other words, I take the basic type of settlement pattern to be one of ceremonial center surrounded by dispersed hamlets in a manner approaching that of modern Zinacantan. This conclusion is in line with our best settlement pattern data—from Gordon Willey's project in the Belize Valley (Willey 1956a) and from the survey work of William R. Bullard (1960) in the Petén. In fact, it is very tempting to interpret Zinacantan center as a major ceremonial center, the waterhole groups as minor ceremonial centers, and the "patrilineage" clusters as hamlets in the same order that Bullard outlines in his survey of the Petén. At any rate, the order of magnitude is quite similar, even though the Willey and Bullard data come from the lowlands and Zinacantan occupies highlands at 7000 feet. This suggests to me that the Maya did in fact tend to activate a basic type of settlement pattern whenever military and geographical circumstances permitted, whether this was in the lowlands or highlands.

4.2. Taking the argument one step further, I would like to advance the hypothesis that the early Maya may have also organized at least some orders in their priestly hierarchies in the ceremonial centers by means of a system of rotation in office with men coming in from the outlying hamlets to serve a year in cargos and then returning to corn-farming while they

accumulated resources enough to ask for the next higher position in the system of graded ranks. If such a system prevailed, the mystery as to how dispersed Maya settlements were structurally integrated and how the supposed priestly class managed to persuade the peasants to bring food into the ceremonial center and provide labor to support them and to build and maintain the centers would be answered. It would mean that there was less of a gulf between the peasants farming corn in the hinterland and the priests in the ceremonial center than has been supposed. Instead, men would rotate between being peasant farmers and priests within a system that still prevails in basic type in Zinacatan today.

4.3. I can anticipate several objections to this hypothesis right off. What about the Spanish reports of aristocracies in Yucatan and in highland Guatemala? To this question I would remind Maya scholars that these systems had clearly been under influence, if not outright conquest, from Central Mexico for over 500 years by the time the Spanish arrived, and we know that Central Mexico did have strongly aristocratic systems. How could a series of rotating offices have provided the leisure to develop a complex Maya calendar, Maya writing that we cannot yet wholly decipher, and notable achievements in art, mathematics, and astronomy? I think it is possible that were we looking at these intellectual and artistic achievements from the inside rather than from the outside, they would not seem so complex. If we were Maya priests in the Classic, we would *know* what all the glyphs meant and would not have a celebrated argument going on between Thompson and Knorozov. I think it is questionable as to whether the ancient Maya carried along *vastly* more knowledge than contemporary Zinacantan priests regularly carry in their heads as to the details of ceremonial life.

4.4. Is there any evidence that the present religious hierarchy in Zinacantan is wholly of Spanish origin? It is clear that certain features are—the names of the offices are Spanish and many of the cargos are attached to Catholic saints. But if the saints are descendants of Maya idols and the old Maya names for cargos were replaced by Spanish names, we could probably account for these Spanish elements. Otherwise, I

have found little evidence that the basic system exists in Spain or that it has a distribution beyond the Maya area and Oaxaca.

4.5. Is there any archaeological or ethnohistorical evidence for the pre-Conquest existence of the system? Again, Gordon Willey's (1956b) data from the Belize Valley suggests that "...the relationship between rural village and ceremonial center may have been considerably more tight-knit than the conventional picture would have it." He adds that "...it is likely that the ceremonial centers recruited artisans, retainers, and even some levels of the priesthood from peasant groups." I am just beginning to examine the ethnohistorical evidence, but there is again some very suggestive evidence from Fuentes y Guzman, Zurita, and Las Casas that priestly rulers proceeded through lesser offices to higher offices by services performed, and not by virtue of blood in an aristocratic type system.

4.6. There of course exists the possibility that there was a core of permanent priests at the top, especially by the time of the late Classic when we find elaborate tombs for special people in the ceremonial centers; and that these permanent priests carried the major responsibility while the lower ranks were filled by rotation in a graded series. At any rate, I submit that this hypothesis which runs so much against the current thought about Maya priests and rulers and about the idea of a revolt of peasants against priestly rule as a possible explanation of the decline of the Classic ought to be explored. It is clear that we need to study the Maya in terms of *Maya* data—archaeological, ethnohistorical, and ethnological—and not simply extrapolate to the Maya what we know of more highly organized aristocratic systems in central Mexico.

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